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AUTHOR Davis, Stephen F.
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ABSTRACT

Academic dishonestly appears to be a perennial problem associated with higher education. The analysis presented in this paper is a composite of the results of two questionnaires administered to students at a variety of institutions--large state schools, medium state schools, large private schools, small private schools, as well as several two-year schools. The findings suggest that women report lower cheating rates than men and that the percentages of men and women at small, private liberal arts colleges who report having cheated in college is significantly lower than the percentages of their counterparts who report having cheated at larger institutions. Cheating to improve grades was found to be a leading motivator. Using crib notes and cheat sheets and copying answers from nearby papers were the two most frequently reported methods of cheating. Students listed a variety of other creative methods of cheating as well. Other parts of this paper look at the responsibility of the faculty and the institution to respond to cheating, how to discourage cheating in the classroom and punishment for cheating. While certain external preventative measures may deter cheating, the data indicates that what is really needed is the development in students of an internalized code of ethics which is opposed to cheating. It is suggested that a theory of understanding is needed, a model that naturally resists cheating because cheating deprives individuals of opportunities to test their personal theories of understanding. Understanding is required for competence, and competence for success, and if educators personally subscribe to this model and teach it with fervor to their students, academic dishonesty may be reduced. (NB)

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Cheating In College Is For A Career: Academic Dishonesty In The 1990s

Stephen F. Davis

Department of Psychology

Emporia State University

Emporia, KS 66801

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Cheating In College Is For A Career: Academic Dishonesty In The 1990s

The first class period of each new academic term is a unique occurrence for teachers and students alike. As instructors we are hopeful that these students will find our classes intellectually stimulating and rewarding, if not enjoyable.

Standing in front of that sea of faces at the initial class session, another, more sobering, prediction can be made with no small degree of certainty. Some of these students will engage in, or at least attempt to engage in, academic dishonesty.

Prevalence

Unfortunately, academic dishonesty appears to be a perennial problem associated with higher education. Despite the fact that reports of academically dishonest practices have appeared for over 60 years, concerted research efforts appear to have been mounted only during the past two decades. This recent surge of interest may be attributed to the fact that some educators, such as Singhal (1982), feel that "cheating has become one of the major problems in education today." Similarly, Haines, Diekhoff, LaBeff, and Clark (1986) have stated that "student dishonesty on college campuses throughout the nation has been widely recognized as epidemic."

An analysis of reports over the past 50 years suggests that these views may well be accurate. Drake (1941) reported a cheating rate of 23%, while Goldsen, Rosenberg, William, and Suchman (1960) reported rates of 38% and 49% for 1952 and 1960, respectively. Hetherington and Feldman (1964) increased the rate to 64%, while Baird (1980) indicated that 75.5% of his sample admitted to cheating in college. Jendreck (1989) placed the typical rate at "between 40% and 60%." Clearly, academic dishonesty is an issue worthy of research leading to understanding and, hopefully, the implementation of effective corrective measures.

We became interested in the study of academic dishonesty six years ago. This interest lead to the development of a 21-item survey instrument. Armed with our questionnaire, we set off to investigate academic dishonesty in college. Over 6,000 completed questionnaires later, we felt that we had learned more about cheating than was possible. However, as this mountain of data was analyzed, new questions and issues emerged. Hence, a second, seven-item questionnaire was devised. To date, the second questionnaire has been administered to 2,153 upper-level college students. Today we will consider a composite of the results obtained from both questionnaires.

Our data have come from a variety of institutions--large state schools, medium state schools, large private schools, small private schools, as well as several two-year schools. Geographically, our samples were taken from disparate locations in the United States.

The data from our original project yielded several interesting results. First, the majority of the students we surveyed felt that it is wrong to cheat. In all of our samples, the percentage of students answering yes to the question "Is it wrong to cheat?" never fell below 90%. This opinion stands in sharp contrast to the percentage of students who rerported cheating in high school and college. Concerning cheating in high school, rates as low as 51% (reported by women at a small, regional state university) and as high as 83% (reported by men at a large, state university) were recorded. The mean value was slightly over 76%.

Turning to cheating at the collegiate level, we found that the overall percentage was significantly lower than in high school. A low rate of 9% was reported by women at one small, private liberal arts college. The high rate of 64% was reported by men at a small, regional state university. Hence, other than extending the range toward the lower end of the scale for small,

private liberal arts institutions, our data are similar to those reported by Jendreck (1989).

The respondents to the second questionnaire corroborated our original findings. Because only schools having 3,000 or more students were surveyed in the second study, rates below 40% were not observed. The lowest percentage of self-reported academic dishonesty in college was 42%, the highest percentage was 64%. Moreover, the majority of the students in each sample reported having cheated in high school (the lowest percentage was 71%, the highest percentage was 79%).

One specific goal of the second questionnaire was to investigate the frequency of cheating. Evaluation of repeat offenders yielded some rather disturbing data. In high school the majority (52%) of those who cheated were repeat offenders, the average number of offenses was 6.47. The figures are only slightly better when we consider repeat offenders in college. Forty-eight percent of those who cheat in college do so on multiple occasions. The average number of offenses for collegiate repeat offenders is 4.25.

A closer analysis of the multiple offenders provides a clue concerning the genesis of the collegiate repeat offender. Virtually all (98.64%) of the students who reported cheating on multiple occasions in college

had also cheated on multiple occasions in high school. Of the students who reported cheating only once in high school, only 24.36% reported cheating in college, and then on no more than one occasion. Of the students who did not cheat in high school, only 1.51% reported cheating in college, and then on no more than one occasion. The message inherent in these results and their potential extrapolation to future behavior are clear.

If you have paid close attention to these figures, the answer is "yes" to two questions that may have occurred to you. Whether it be in high school or in college, women reported lower cheating rates than men. While this difference has not always been statistically reliable on a sample-by-sample basis, I am quite confident that meta analysis would yield a highly significant effect.

Second, the percentages of men and women at small, private liberal arts colleges who report having cheated in college is significantly lower than the percentages reported by their counterparts at larger institutions, whether they be state or private schools. Further research needs to be conducted to determine if these differences are attributable to: (a) the type of student attracted by these schools, (b) a greater prevalence of

strictly enforced honor codes at the small schools, or (c) a reluctance on the part of students at the small schools to overtly acknowledge having engaged in such behavior.

Motivations and Causes

Having established the fact that academic dishonesty is widespread and represents a major threat to the integrity of higher education, a consideration of the causes involved seems to be in order.

Over 50 years ago, Drake (1941) proposed that stress and the pressure for good grades were important determinants of academic dishonesty. Reflecting the continued importance of these factors, Keller (1976) reported that 69% of the students in his study cited pressure for good grades as a major reason for cheating. In more recent reports Baird (1980) and Barnett and Dalton (1981) indicate that these pressures remain important.

Our most recent study also attempted to delineate the specific causes of academic dishonesty. The most frequently cited reason for cheating was "I do study, but cheat to enhance my score" (29.75%). "My job cuts down on study time" (14.28%) and "usually don't study" (13.60%) also were high on the list. "I cheat so my GPA looks better to prospective employers" (8.16%) and "I

feel pressure from parents to get good grades, so I cheat" (6.80%) also received substantial endorsement. A variety of other reasons, such as:

-- "pass the class"

-- "class is too hard"

-- "only if I'm not sure of my answers"

-- "if I blank out and someone else's paper is in clear sight"

provide considerable food for thought and accounted for 18.36% of the reasons for cheating. The number of references to external causes and situations is noteworthy.

Situational factors also appear to have exacerbated the frequency of cheating. For example, the emergence of large, crowded classes in which multiple-choice tests are the preferred mode of evaluation has been found to be conducive to cheating (Houston, 1976). The problems created by this situation are compounded by the lack of secretarial assistance for the preparation of alternate forms of examinations. The availability of computerized test banks which offer instructors the ability to scramble the order of test questions, as well as the answers for individual questions, appears to offer potential relief from this particular problem.

The fact that many students have the opinion that

"everyone cheats" (Houston, 1976) or that "cheating is a normal part of life" (Baird, 1980), certainly does little to discourage cheating. In fact, it appears that the old adage "cheaters never win" may not be applicable in the case of academic dishonesty. With cheating rates that may be as high as 75-85% (e.g., Baird, 1980; Jendreck, 1989) and detection rates as low as 1.30% (Haines et al., 1986), it would appear that this behavior currently is being reinforced, not extinguished. Even if cheating is detected, one cannot be assured that swift and appropriate punishment will be forthcoming. In fact, Singhal (1982) contends "...that most educational units in a college do not pay adequate attention to cheating and moreover do not have techniques to deal with cheating if it is detected."

To what extent do students fear being caught? Our recent data indicates that of those students who reported cheating in college, less than 50% expressed concern about being detected. It is noteworthy that the majority (63%) of the students who expressed concern over detection were those who reported cheating on only one occasion. Moreover, the fear of detection differed in intensity between one-time and multiple-offenders. On a scale that ranged from minimally fearful (1) to very fearful (7), the average score of the multiple offender

was 3.12, while the average score of the multiple offenders was 5.87. In sum, fewer multiple offenders fear being caught and what fear they have is less intense than that of the one-time offenders.

Corroborating many of these views, Dr. Patricia Keith-Spiegel (1990) made the following points in a presentation titled, "Ethical Conflicts Between Students And Professors", at the 1990 meeting of the Western Psychological Association. Based upon the results of a national survey, she indicated that:

1. "We put a lot of pressures on our students."

2. "Young people see huge reinforcing properties in cheating. It's everywhere."

3. A new view of ownership appears to be emerging among our students. For example, with regard to the purchase of a term paper, one student felt that "since he had bought it, it was his own work."

4. Our students may even be developing a new ethic with regard to cheating off of another person's paper. Dr. Keith-Spiegel indicated that "one student felt that it was not 'wrong' if someone said that they could cheat off of their paper."

Cheating Techniques

Having considered the prevalence of cheating and some of the causes and motivations for engaging in such behaviors, I felt that it might be interesting to examine how this crime is being perpetrated. After all, if we are to catch acadmeic thieves, it will help us to know their modus operandi. Our surveys have provided a plethora of data on this topic. For example, it probably will come as no surprise that copying answers from a nearby paper and using crib notes or cheat sheets are the two most frequently used methods of cheating. Among those who admitted to cheating, a low of 27% was reported by one sample of women for the use of crib notes, while a high of 62% was reported by one sample of men for copying answers from a nearby paper. Succinctly put, if students are going to cheat, one of these two methods will be used approximately 80% of the time. Thus, 20% of the reported cheating techniques fall into that amorphous "other" category. Our respondents were asked to describe these other methods, if they had been used. These answers provided some real food for thought; if we could only harness these creative energies in a more productive manner!

1. "We worked out a system of hand and feet positions." (The foot-position or foot-movement theme

was mentioned by several students.)

2. "Each corner of the desk top matched an answer--A, B, C, or D. We simply touched the corner we thought was the right answer." (Hand signals were a favorite with several students.)

3. "The teacher got the test from a book that was in the library. So, everybody had the answers before the test was given."

4. "I stole a copy of the test and looked up the answers ahead of time and memorized them." (This theme reappeared on a number of questionnaires.)

5. "I hid a calculator down my pants."

6. "We traded papers during the test and compared answers."

7. "Opened up my book and looked up the answers."

8. The answers were tape recorded before the test and I just took my Walkman to class and listened to the answers during the test."

9. I had small velcro fasteners attached to my boots. I wrote the answers on paper that had velcro backs and attached them to my boots. To see the answers, all I had to do was cross my legs.

10. I've done everything from writing all the way up my arm, to having notes in a plastic bag inside my mouth.

11. I would make a paper flower, write notes on it, and then pin it on my blouse.

12. One student fills in two "scantron" answer sheets and passes one to a friend.

13. I wrote the answers on my thigh and raised my skirt to see them during the test.

14. I asked the last-period students about the test.

This sampling of creative methodology indicates that faculty members may not be able to afford themselves the luxury of reading a book, writing, or grading papers during an examination. Vigilence appears to be the key word here.

Faculty and Institutional Responsibility

This latter consideration raises yet another question. Should faculty members be concerned with academic dishonesty? The concept of academic integrity, upon which our profession is based, would seem to provide a compelling argument in the affirmative. Paradoxically, those same students, whose cheating data we have been considering, agree. In no sample have we obtained less than 90% "yes" answers to the question 'Should an instructor care whether or not students cheat on an exam?"

Keith-Spiegel's (1990) national survey also

contains data that are related to this issue. She reported that 21% of her faculty respondents had ignored evidences of cheating, and that 30% felt that this was an appropriate reaction. Confronting students in such situations may result in undesirable consequences. A student's career may be ruined. One may become entangled in a lengthy, time-consuming process of litigation. As with the students' changing views concerning the ownership of term papers and the appropriateness of cheating off of another person's paper, faculty views concerning detection and intervention appear to have changed also.

In an attempt to more clearly delineate faculty roles and responsibilities, we undertook a study of academic policies at various institutions (Weaver, Davis, Look, Buzzanga & Neal, 1991). A sample of 200 college catalogs was collected. Content analysis of the academic dishonesty sections of these catalogs revealed the following eight general themes:

1. Definition of academic integrity or statement of expectations for academic conduct.

2. Responsibility.

3. Definition of dishonest acts.

4. An honor code.

5. Procedures for handling suspected academic

dishonesty.

6. An honor committee.

7. Punishment.

8. An appeals process.

With regard to the second theme, responsibility, those catalogs that contained such information indicated that it was the faculty member's obligation to inform his/her students of policies pertaining to academic dishonesty. Hence, the written policies seem to be in agreement with the sentiments of the students; it is important for faculty members to discuss cheating with their classes and clearly delineate the penalties for such behavior.

However, the strength of this obligation may not be as pervasive as it appears. Of the 200 catalogs surveyed only 55% (63 public institutions, 47 private institutions) contained relevant sections. While we will readily acknowledge that catalogs are not the only printed source for such policies and that many colleges and universities have excellent and strong academic dishonesty policies, a rather disturbing message seems to be embedded here. The institution may not wish to become involved in such matters. Hence, the responsibility is being passed along to individual departments and faculty. For example, in response to a

request for such a university wide policy, the faculty senate at my institution decided that finding consensus for such a university wide policy would be difficult. Instead, each academic unit was deemed responsible for articulating its own position. In addition to the mixed messages that the creation of a number of independent policies will send to students, the Keith-Spiegel data suggest how individual faculty may choose to view this situation.

In my opinion this situation needs to be amended and some degree of standardization and centralization achieved by each institution. In the words of Richard A. Fass (1986), Vice President and Dean of Students at Pomona College, "If a policy about academic dishonesty does not exist already, a college or university should undertake to develop one. This process will focus attention and discussion on the ethical issues involved, and will provide a basis for regular, ongoing education about academic ethics. If the institutions are reluctant to address this issue and assume responsibility, who can fault the faculty for following suit?"

Discouraging Cheating In The Classroom

Let's assume for the moment that you agree with the students' perception and as an instructor you <u>are</u> concerned with cheating. What measures can be taken to deter or discourage such behavior in your classroom?

Regardless of the size and type of institution, our initial study indicated that there was consensus among the students concerning measures that would deter cheating during an examination period. The most popular deterrent was preparation of separate forms of the test. This option was followed closely by the following <u>preferred</u> measures:

1) Simply informing the students <u>why</u> they should not cheat. In other words, explain the consequences.

2) Arranging seating such that the students are separated by a desk.

3) Walking up and down the rows during the test.

4) Constantly watching the students.

According to the students, the less preferred deterrents included:

1) Announcing do not cheat.

2) Having assigned seats.

3) Having all essay exams.

4) Requiring the students to leave their belongings outside the classroom during an examination.

Several of the preferred deterrents, such as having separate forms of the exam and separating the students by a desk, do have merit. Common sense also suggests that some of the less preferred methods also might prove to be effective. However, their implementation may be rather difficult. For example, students have a notorious dislike for all-essay tests. Legitimate reasons for not preferring to have assigned seats and not wanting to leave one's belongings outside the classroom are less obvious.

While these measures may help deter cheating _during_ an examination, they do not elucidate those measures that would effectively keep students from considering cheating as an alternative _prior_ to the examination. Our second questionnaire dealt with this issue. In response to the question "If a professor has strict penalties for cheating, and informs the class about them at the beginning of the semester, would this prevent you from cheating?" Over 40% of the men in each sample responded "No." On the other hand, less than 10% of the women in each sample responded "No." Thus, we may conclude that some students, especially women, may be more responsive to potential penalties. A closer inspection indicated that the majority of students in each sample of "No" respondents reported cheating in college. Students who

were not influenced by instructor-announced penalties listed death and "nothing" as possible deterents. Among the potentially effective penalties were:

-- Expulsion from the institution.

-- Fail the class.

-- See the Dean.

-- Receive a 0 on the test.

-- Public humiliation.

The results of a current study conducted by my Belmont University colleagues, Lonnie Yandell and Peter Giordano, their students Jennifer Weiss and Kim Gilbert, and myself (Weiss, Gilbert, Giordano & Davis, 1993) add another dimension to our consideration of punishment. In this study it was shown that Type B personality traits, grade orientation, and higher levels of academic dishonesty were positively related. Conversely, Type A personality traits, learning orientation, and lower levels of academic dishonesty were positively related. The difference between the cheating behavior of learning-oriented and grade-oriented students suggests that different types of sanctions may be necessary for these two groups of students.

Punishment

What if the deterrents are not effective and someone is caught cheating? What should be done? Once again, the views of our student respondents are quite interesting. A substantial percentage in each of the samples in our original study felt that nothing should be done about detected academic dishonesty until after completion of the test. There is merit in this suggestion. One's class is not disrupted and the culprit is not humiliated unnecessarily. On the other hand, delaying action until completion of the test period may be perceived as tacit condonement.

However, it was disheartening to find that the most popular "punishment" was to tell the students to keep their eyes on their own paper. The efficacy of this approach certainly is debatable. Likewise, one might question the advisability of simply taking the test away and allowing the student to start over. Regretably, over 20% of the students endorsed these two options. More optimistically, another 20% of the students did endorse awarding a failing grade to someone who had been caught cheating. These two apparently divergent viewpoints may well represent the opinions of those who have and have not engaged in academically dishonest behavior, respectively.

Conclusions

While most of the results we have considered are quite straight forward, I remind you of the high number of external events that have been mentioned during this presentation. For example, such things as pressures for good grades, the stresses students are placed under, and the reinforcements that may be accumulated through academic dishonesty were considered. In addition to these more general considerations, I call your attention to a specific situation that seems to be gaining in popularity. I am told that copies of computerized test files are for sale to students at some universities as soon as they become available from the publisher. Moreover, students may reduce their bills with such dealers by supplying new, instructor-generated questions.

Consider also the following data that appeared in Newsweek. The Pinnacle Group, Inc., an international public-relations corporation, surveyed 1,093 high school seniors. The questions pertained to how far the students would stretch ethical standards to get ahead in the business world. The results of the Pinnacle Group survey included the following items:

1. When asked if they would be willing to face six months' probation on an illegal deal in which they made

$10 million, 59% of the students responded either "definitely yes" or "maybe."

2. 36% indicated that they would plagarize in order to pass a certification test.

3. 67% said they would inflate their business-expense reports.

4. 50% of the students said they would exaggerate on an insurance damage report.

5. 66% said that they would lie to achieve a business objective.

6. 40% indicated that they would accept a gift from a supplier worth more than $100; 23% would accept $500 in cash from a supplier; 32% would accept a free vacation.

To me these results are alarming. They are, however, in accord with the following statements from several of the students who completed our survey. One student indicated that, "Generally when someone cheats, it's like adultery, what they don't know, ain't going to hurt 'em." Another indicated "I will never be caught." Finally, one of the most telling statements, from which the title of this presentation was drawn, indicated that "cheating in high school is for grades, cheating in college is for a career." Clearly, many of the students included in the Pinnacle Group survey, as well as <u>many</u>

of the students in our two studies, do not have a well-developed, internalized sense of integrity, academic or otherwise. Hence, their behavior is directed, to a great extent, by external pressures.

Corroborating the importance of external agents, Forsyth, Pope, and McMillan (1985) reported data pertaining to an attributional analysis of academic dishonesty. When they compared the causal inferences of cheaters and noncheaters, they found that the external attributions of cheaters were significantly greater than those of noncheaters. Equally relevant was the finding that the number of external attributions made by the cheaters for the dishonest act was significantly greater than those made by a group of uninvolved observers. In short those who cheat are providing themselves with excuses for this type of behavior.

While several of the preventive measures we have considered <u>may</u> deter cheating on a situation-to-situation basis, our data also indicates that such measures will not succeed in the long run. Only when the students have developed a stronger commitment to the educational process and an internalized code of ethics which opposes cheating will the problem have been dealt with effectively.

How does one go about facilitating the development

of such internal controls? While I do not propose to have all the answers, the following model, developed by Wayne Ludvigson at Texas Christian University, appears to be on the right track.

We begin with the hypothesis that a Theory of Understanding is needed. What constitutes understanding? According to Ludvigson's model, there are six major components of understanding:

1. Understanding is not rote memorization (though we recognize that some things must be memorized).

2. Understaning is not learning lots of isolated "facts."

3. Understanding involved the creation of a "personal" theory about something.

4. Understanding permits generalization of inferences to new situations.

5. Understanding involves "perspective."

6. Understanding results in knowing what is important and what is not.

Such a Theory of Understanding is one that naturally resists cheating because cheating deprives individuals of opportunities to test their personal theories of understanding. Now, let's see if we can't tie this model back to reality a bit and indicate its importance.

If you are willing to assume that understanding is required for competence, then the following relations tend to flow naturally. Competence, in turn, is required for success. Success is required for self-reliance and self-reliance is required for happiness. Undermining the basic building block of understanding through cheating weakens the entire chain of events that follows. If one personally subscribes to such a model and then teaches it, with fervor, to his or her students, I believe that the result would be a decrease in academic dishonesty.

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